OVERVIEW OF ASEAN-CELAC RELATIONS

Background Information on CELAC

- The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was initiated on 23 February 2010 at the Rio Group-Caribbean Community Unity Summit. It was then formally established on 3 December 2011 with the signing of the Declaration of Caracas. CELAC is the successor of the Rio Group and the Latin American and Caribbean Summit on Integration and Development (CALC).¹ As stipulated in the Caracas Declaration, CELAC pledged to promote the implementation of the action plans or work programmes of its two predecessor groups.

- CELAC members are namely Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El-Salvador, Guatemala, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

- Made up of 33 Latin American and Caribbean states, CELAC aims to unite all Latin American and Caribbean States in order to create a political, economic and socio-cultural integration to advance social welfare, the quality of life, economic growth and promote independent and sustainable development.

- The official bodies of the organisation are: Summit of Heads of State and Government, Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Pro Tempore Presidency, Specialised Meetings and the Troika (current, former and incoming Pro Tempore Presidents of CELAC). The Pro Tempore Presidency of CELAC is held for a period of one year. Mexico is the current Pro Tempore President of CELAC since 8 January 2020.

- The CELAC 2014 Plan of Action which was adopted at the Second CELAC Summit in Havana, Cuba, sets the target for CELAC to advance cooperation with regional partners, such as the African Union, ASEAN and BRICS. The same aspiration was also stipulated in the 2015 and 2016 CELAC Plans of Action.

¹ On 18 March 2015, H.E. Leonardo Arizaga, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility of the Republic of Ecuador and then CELAC National Coordinator, wrote to H.E. Le Luong Minh, then Secretary-General of ASEAN, informing that CELAC has replaced the Rio Group and CALC.
Engagement between ASEAN and CELAC

- ASEAN-CELAC engagement is limited to dialogue at the ministerial level at the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). There has only been one ASEAN-CELAC Ministerial Meeting which was held on 27 September 2014 at the sidelines of the 69th UNGA in New York. The Meeting was co-chaired by the Foreign Minister of Singapore (Singapore volunteered to co-chair the Meeting) and the Foreign Minister of Costa Rica (President Pro Tempore of CELAC for 2014).

- At the Meeting, CELAC expressed its interest in forging cooperation with ASEAN in areas such as agriculture and fisheries, nanotechnology, and disaster management, among others. CELAC also proposed to promote exchange of information and sharing of ASEAN’s experience in the areas of human rights promotion, education, poverty reduction, as well as ASEAN’s statistical system. However, there has yet to be any follow-up actions to the decision of the Meeting.

- The coordinatorship of ASEAN-CELAC relations is rotated alphabetically among ASEAN Member States on one-year basis. Malaysia is the country coordinator for ASEAN-CELAC relations for 2021.

Engagement between ASEAN and RIO GROUP

- ASEAN-Rio Group relations began in 1990 with the meeting between ASEAN Foreign Ministers and the Rio Group (comprising a troika of Foreign Ministers of Venezuela, Columbia, Uruguay and representatives from other members of the Rio Group) at the margins of the UNGA. The informal meeting explored possible areas of cooperation, such as on trade, drugs, environment, and debt. They shared the view that both sides should maintain regular contacts to promote and increase trade relations, including direct business-to-business contact.

- The Meeting also agreed in principle to convene regular ASEAN-Rio Group Ministerial Meeting in New York at the margins of the UNGA. They highlighted that the Ministerial Meeting should be informal and not structured, with an open agenda. It was also viewed that the Permanent Representatives of both sides should meet and discuss issues that have been identified prior to each Ministerial Meeting. The Meeting further agreed that the Permanent Representatives of the ASEAN Chair and the Pro Tempore President of the Rio Group would serve as the contact points for both sides.
The ASEAN-Rio Group Ministers met again in 1991, 1999, 2000 and 2010. During their meeting in September 2000, both sides reiterated the importance of enhancing relations and cooperation. It was proposed that the Permanent Representatives of ASEAN and the Rio Group in New York explore the possibility of joint specific programmes for future cooperation.

At the sidelines of the 65th UNGA in 2010, the Ministers exchanged views on possible areas of cooperation, such as tourism, people-to-people connectivity through sports, trade facilitation, inter-connectivity through direct air flight connection and sea port facilities, agriculture including food safety and food security, as well as cooperation in alternative and renewable energy, science and technology, among others. They shared their shared concern on climate change issues and reaffirmed commitment to work together, especially at the UN Climate Change Conference held in Cancun Mexico in 2010.